



OHS NPRM: General Fact Sheet

Summary

The Administration for Children and Families is issuing a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to revamp the Head Start Performance Standards with the goal of strengthening and improving the quality of Head Start programs. This action is part of the Administration's early learning efforts to ensure that all children start school ready to succeed.

The bipartisan Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 called for a review and revision of these Performance Standards to ensure that all Head Start programs provide high quality, comprehensive services that lead to strong outcomes for Head Start children. This proposed rule does just that—setting a high bar for Head Start quality. The proposed performance standards put in place higher standards for curriculum, staff development, and program duration, all based on research and effective practice. At the same time, the proposed rule makes program requirements easier for current and future program leaders to understand and reduces administrative burden so that Head Start directors can focus on delivering high quality early learning programs that help put children onto a path of success.

This rule builds on previous work from this Administration to strengthen Head Start. Beginning with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which invested \$2.1 Billion in Head Start and Early Head Start to reach an additional 61,000 children and families, the President has made quality improvements in the Head Start program a high priority. This was followed by actions in 2013 to require all Head Start grantees that fail to meet a new set of rigorous benchmarks to re-compete for continued federal funding. Most recently, the Department of Health and Human Services issued new eligibility rules that ensure Head Start serves our neediest and most vulnerable children.

Head Start has long been a leader in providing high-quality early learning opportunities, having served more than 30 million low-income children and their families. But Head Start can and must do more. Findings from monitoring reviews and research confirm that there is significant variation in quality among Head Start programs and stronger outcomes are achievable. This proposed rule is an important next step in the program's history, establishing a set of 21st century performance standards that will result in stronger Head Start programs and better outcomes for children and families.

Major Provisions and Proposed Changes

Promoting Effective Teaching and Learning in Head Start Classrooms

A high-quality early learning program has a well-trained, caring teacher who delivers a comprehensive and rigorous curriculum that is developmentally appropriate and that promotes all aspects of early learning necessary for school readiness, including social and emotional wellbeing, and cognitive development. The proposed rule would set high standards for effective teaching and learning in every classroom.

- We propose to strengthen educational standards and curriculum requirements to ensure effective teaching in Head Start, based on the best research about how children learn and develop.
- We propose to ensure program curricula and assessments are aligned with the new Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, Birth to Five.
- We propose to build teacher skills and core competencies through a system of evidence-based professional development activities, including mentor-coaching.
- We propose to require systematic local use of valid and reliable assessment data that provides useable information for teachers to individualize and improve services.
- Consistent with long-standing Head Start policy, we propose to clearly prohibit the suspension or expulsion of children from Head Start programs.

Expanding Time for Learning and Development of Head Start Children

The proposed standards would require most Head Start programs to operate for at least a full school-day and a full-school year. Research shows that disadvantaged children benefit from more exposure to enriching early learning programs than is provided by the part-day, part-year programs under the current minimum Head Start standards. Research on full-day, instructional time, summer learning loss, and attendance all indicate that dosage is central to improving child outcomes.

- We propose to increase the minimum number of required service days per year for preschoolers from 128 to 180 days and the minimum required hours per day for preschoolers from 3.5 to 6 hours.
- This proposed change is consistent with the President's FY 2016 Budget, which requests almost \$1.1 billion in funding to support serving Head Start children in full-day, full-year programs without compromising access to the program.
- Many programs already meet the full school-day, school-year standard, but a significant number do not. The proposal would require a shorter duration program to adopt the new standard unless it can demonstrate that a shorter program more effectively meets its community's needs.
- We propose to include our longstanding interpretation of the Act's duration minimums for Early Head Start, which is 230 days for no less than 6 hours a day.

Maintaining and Strengthening Head Start's Comprehensive Services and Family Engagement

We propose to maintain Head Start's commitment to comprehensive services as central to helping children succeed.

- We propose all staff receive individualized professional development ensure high quality comprehensive service delivery.
- We propose to strengthen parent engagement services by providing opportunities for parents to participate in an evidence-based parenting curriculum and targeting intensive family services to where they are most needed.
- We propose to retain core health services and streamline requirements to make them easier to implement.

- We propose to strengthen mental health services to support teachers and promote effective classroom management through clearer requirements about the expectations for using mental health consultation.
- We propose an approach to serving dual language learners that reflects an up-to-date understanding of how to best support their development.
- We propose to maintain and strengthen services for vulnerable populations, such as homeless children, children in foster care, and children with disabilities, to ensure they are getting the help they need to succeed.
- We maintain parents' critical role in program governance.

Ensuring the Health and Safety of Head Start Children

We propose to maintain Head Start's high bar for child safety and propose to require programs to implement a system of health and safety policies, practices, and procedures that includes ongoing training, oversight and correction, and continuous improvement. We also give programs greater flexibility to adjust their policies and procedures according to the most up-to-date information about how to keep children safe.

- We propose that programs conduct state, local, or tribal, and federal criminal background checks on prospective and current employees, and clear them through available child abuse and neglect and sex offender registries every five years, consistent with new requirements in the federally-supported child care subsidy system.
- We strengthen the standards of conduct for staff, including an explicit prohibition on the use of seclusion and restraint.

Promoting Effective Management and Continuous Improvement of Head Start Programs

The new standards will facilitate stronger program management and ensure that programs are using data to improve their programs on an ongoing basis.

- We propose to codify best practices for the appropriate use of data which includes establishing goals and measureable objectives, and using data, ongoing oversight, and correction to set and revise goals and objectives to best meet the needs of children and families.
- We have reduced bureaucratic burden by focusing on outcomes over process and plans, eliminating Head Start specific requirements where government wide procedures exist, and giving grantees more flexibility in holding sub-grantees accountable.
- We propose procedures for sharing data and protecting personally identifiable information, balancing the need to protect privacy with ensuring Head Start programs participate in state and local data systems, including those developed through the statewide longitudinal data systems grant program.

Public Comment

The NPRM is open for public comment for 60 days. We welcome public comments on all aspects of the rule as it is a critical way to ensure that the final rule will raise the bar on quality and help put all children onto a path of school success.